

# Lawmakers hopeful about lifting decades-old nuclear moratorium

**Posted:** Friday, January 15, 2016 12:24 AM

*BY MALLORY PANUSKA [mpanuska@paducahsun.com](mailto:mpanuska@paducahsun.com)*

Local lawmakers are optimistic that this could be the year for lifting a decades-old moratorium on construction of nuclear power production facilities in Kentucky.

Two bills aiming to pave the way for future nuclear energy production have been filed in the House and Senate and assigned to committees.

Rep. Gerald Watkins, D-Paducah, serves as primary sponsor of the House version, which would "allow construction within a 50-mile radius of a site previously used for the manufacture of nuclear products."

Sen. Danny Carroll, R-Paducah, introduced the Senate version, which aims to lift the ban across the entire commonwealth.

The Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant, located in west Paducah, was the site of uranium enrichment activities from the 1950s until May 2013.

In 1984, Kentucky joined a handful of other states in passing the moratorium.

Paducah's facility is the state's only former nuclear production site, and leading up to its closure, lawmakers spent several years trying to remove the ban to no avail.

"I believe the time has come," Watkins said of lifting the ban. "We've made adjustments in it where it would basically just apply to Paducah, within a 50-mile radius outside of Paducah. I think we're on sound ground proposing that legislation."

He added that he does not believe House members will lift the ban statewide.

Carroll said that while statewide passage may be more challenging, he plans to pursue it diligently.

He cited the threat of Environmental Protection Agency regulations to eastern Kentucky's coal production facilities as a catalyst.

"I think it's important to file it statewide in order to attract business to the state," he said.

Rep. Steven Rudy, R-West Paducah, is one of the legislators who has been working to lift the moratorium. He said passing the legislation, in any form, is one of his top priorities this session and it has a solid chance of gaining approval.

"It's very, very important to me as far as the area," he said. "We just have that trained workforce. I think we have a lot of potential for that in our area."

The House bill is simple, including only the language that would lift the ban within the 50-mile radius. Watkins and co-sponsor Rep. Kenny Imes, R-Murray, pre-filed the bill last month. It was introduced Jan. 5 in the House Tourism Development & Energy Committee.

Carroll filed the Senate bill on Monday, and it was introduced in the Senate Natural Resources & Energy Committee Wednesday.

Since the Paducah plant's shutdown, which forced the layoff of roughly 1,200 workers, cleanup efforts have been underway at the site with a Department of Energy-hired contractor.

Fluor Federal Services and various subcontractors currently have about 1,600 employees performing work that needs to be completed regardless of whether another nuclear facility is ever developed at the site.